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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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TITLE

**Gettysburg: A Study of Lee's Command Effectiveness, 1863**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

AUTHOR

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Title:** Gettysburg: A Study of Lee's Command Effectiveness, 1863

**Author:** Major Matthew W. Foreman, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** General R.E. Lee's effectiveness of command during the Battle of Gettysburg was reduced because of the absence of two of his trusted subordinates and the character of his interaction with other senior leaders in the Army of Northern Virginia.

**Discussion:** The Battle of Chancellorsville is considered to be General Lee's greatest victory and the Battle of Gettysburg his greatest defeat. During the Battle of Chancellorsville General Lee had three subordinates in whom he placed a high level of trust and confidence. At the Battle of Gettysburg General Lee did not have all three of these trusted subordinates and had to contend with new subordinates at a critical time. How General Lee dealt with these new subordinates and interacted with them will be explored to determine if these interactions reduced his ability to command the Army of Northern Virginia effectively during the Battle of Gettysburg. In addition, the impact of General Lee's leadership style in his interactions with his subordinates will be explored.

**Conclusion:** General Lee's dependence on his three trusted subordinates caused his command effectiveness at the Battle of Gettysburg to be reduced when one of those subordinates was killed and another was absent for most of the battle. General Lee's leadership style also negatively impacted how effectively he dealt with less experienced and proven subordinates.

## INTRODUCTION

The study of Civil War history can provide valuable insights that enable future leaders to learn from the mistakes and successes of the past. It can teach those who are willing to accept that in becoming a scholar of military history it is not necessary to focus strictly on the tactics of a single battle, or campaign, or even an entire war. To fully understand how and why peoples engage in armed conflict, it is also necessary to look into the where, when, and most importantly the who. Only in understanding how all of these factors interrelate can events be examined fully. There are many reasons to study the American Civil War, as opposed to other conflicts, and the underlying principles and causes that brought on the war can be fascinating in and of themselves. This however, is beyond the scope of this paper and would detract from the overall goal of the research. Likewise, too narrow a focus on a single day or individual action could prevent one from gaining a full picture of the event or events that are being examined. It is with this in mind that the leadership style of the Confederate General Robert Edward Lee will be explored.

General Robert E. Lee is a remarkable figure who gained fame and notoriety for his service as the Commanding General of the Army of Northern Virginia, and he is considered to be one of the most gifted military leaders in American history. This paper will delve into his background to help gain an understanding of the how he developed his abilities, but will concentrate on just a short period of his time in command of the one of the Confederate Armies. The focus will be from what is considered his greatest military victory at the Battle of Chancellorsville to what is equally considered to be his greatest military defeat at the Battle of Gettysburg. Both events, separated by only a few months, ended in dramatically different outcomes for General Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia, but for this paper the primary

focus will be to examine what factors had the largest impact on why he was defeated at the Battle of Gettysburg.

The decisions that General Lee made were influenced by many factors, but there are a few that are of particular interest, namely: his particular style of leadership, his relationship to those subordinates that he knew well and placed a significant amount of trust and faith in, and how he interacted with his senior subordinates. Was General Lee's greatest defeat the result of some of the same factors that previously made him so successful? This study will not attempt to deflect blame or give excuses as to why General Lee was defeated at Gettysburg since as the Commanding General he was ultimately responsible for the Confederate defeat. It is only to lend support to the idea that General R.E. Lee's effectiveness of command during the Battle of Gettysburg was reduced because of the absence of two of his trusted subordinates and the character of his interaction with other senior leaders in the Army of Northern Virginia.

## **LEE THE MAN**

Robert Edward Lee was the fourth child born to Henry "Light-Horse" Lee and Ann Hill Carter on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1807.<sup>1</sup> The Lee family was part of the Virginia aristocracy, but they eventually came on hard times. Robert's father Henry Lee, a hero from the American Revolutionary War and Virginia governor, had serious monetary difficulties that eventually led to financial ruin. Just two short years after Robert was born, Henry Lee was insolvent and was sent to debtors prison due to the failure of wild speculative enterprises. The family moved to Alexandria and survived on money trusted to Anne from her father. In 1812, Henry Lee was severely injured by a mob while he was protecting a friend who publicly opposed the ongoing war with Great Britain. Henry Lee never fully recovered from his wounds and in 1813 fled to

the West Indies to escape his financial hardships. While attempting to return to the family he left behind in Virginia, Henry Lee died. Anne Lee ensured that her children learned from the reckless and impulsive behavior of their father and Robert would take those lessons to heart. Robert would carry the tarnished reputation of his father with him his entire life.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Lee learned much in his youth. From his father's failings Robert learned self-discipline, financial conscientiousness, and the importance of one's honor. Robert also developed a keen sense of responsibility and devotion from caring for his invalid mother before he was even a teenager. These lessons would serve him well once he entered West Point in 1825.<sup>3</sup> While at West Point young Robert thrived in the harsh environment of the academy. He displayed a talent for all things military, and scored high marks in every category of study. Constant in manner and ability he would eventually finish second in his class, never having received a demerit his entire time at West Point. In addition, Robert was well respected by his peers and the faculty for his diligent study and discipline. Upon graduating, Robert was able to choose his desired branch of service in the US Army because of his high ranking.<sup>4</sup> Robert Lee elected to join the Army Engineer Corps for his first military assignment.

The young Second Lieutenant Lee began his military career at Cockspur Island, Georgia. It was while stationed there that he began courting and eventually married Mary Custis, the great-granddaughter of Martha Washington. Robert and Mary Lee would eventually have seven children, three boys and four girls.<sup>5</sup> Each of his three sons would later join him as officers for the Confederacy. In 1836, now Captain Lee would bolster his reputation within the US Army while working on an engineering project on the Mississippi at St. Louis, Missouri. It would not be until 1846 and the war with Mexico that Lee would experience combat first hand.<sup>6</sup>

Lee's courage and actions during the Mexican War quickly brought him renown and respect within the US Army. Shortly after arriving Lee gained the attention of Major General Winfield Scott and was added to his staff. MGen Scott soon came to realize that Lee was a special officer and relied heavily on him, especially for reconnaissance, as a staff officer during several battles.<sup>7</sup> Lee's analytical and innovative mind, combined with his courage and determination during the Battles of Vera Cruz, Cerro Gordo, and Chapultepec, contributed much to US victories. Lee gained the trust and respect of MGen Scott and was rewarded with several commendations and brevetted promotions by the end of the war. MGen Scott would later write in an official letter that Lee was "the very best soldier that I ever saw in the field."<sup>8</sup>

By the end of the Mexican War Lee had gained the rank of Brevet Colonel, had become a rising star in the US Army, and had also learned many lessons that he would utilize later in his career. Col Lee would come to value reconnaissance, communication, fortifications, and flanking maneuvers as integral parts of strategy. Directly from observing MGen Scott, Lee developed an understanding of the importance of an intelligent trained staff and the significance of having a well developed strategic plan. Finally, Lee learned that sheer audacity could heavily influence the outcome of battle and he would use this as a guiding principle in his future struggles as a commander.<sup>9</sup>

Following the Mexican War, Lee would return to the life of an engineer in the US Army. In 1852, Lee would be offered the post of Superintendent of the Military Academy at West Point. He accepted the position and began to improve the conditions at the facility, focusing on the academics and structures at the school.<sup>10</sup> During this period Lee developed his skills as an observer, watching the cadets and evaluating strengths and frailties of ability and character. In his position of Superintendent Lee came to know and gain respect for a cadet who would later



serve under him during the coming Civil War. His name was James E. B. (Jeb) Stuart. Also, during this time Lee would develop a strong sense of spirituality that he would carry with him the rest of his life.<sup>11</sup>

Brevetted Colonel Lee did not remain at West Point for long. In 1855, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis promoted Lee to the regular army rank of Lieutenant Colonel and made him second in command of the newly formed Second Cavalry Regiment. Two years later Lee took leave from the army to attend to family affairs following the death of his father-in-law. It was during this time that Lee became involved with the events that transpired at Harper's Ferry in 1859. With the assistance of Jeb Stuart, Lee took command of troops in the vicinity of Harper's Ferry and successfully suppressed John Brown and his raiders.<sup>12</sup>

With the election of Republican Presidential Candidate Abraham Lincoln in 1860, the United States was thrown into turmoil and the secession movement in the southern states rapidly gained ground. Early the following year, after several states seceded, now Colonel Lee was offered the position of Commanding General for the US Army. President Lincoln, on the recommendation of General Winfield Scott, requested that Lee lead the Union forces in putting down the rebellion.<sup>13</sup> Lee declined, and after consulting with Gen Scott, a man whom he respected greatly, resigned from the US Army on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1861. Three days later, Lee accepted the appointment of Major General of the forces for the Commonwealth of Virginia. In speaking to the Virginia Convention Lee stated, "I would have much preferred had your choice fallen upon an abler man. Trusting in Almighty God, an approving conscience, and the aid of my fellow-citizens, I devote myself to the service of my native State, in whose behalf alone will I ever again draw my sword."<sup>14</sup> It is clear from his words the importance Lee placed upon loyalty, devotion, and spirituality.

Lee's first year as a General for the Confederate States of America (CSA) was unremarkable. His first campaign, in western Virginia, was a failure and he was subsequently removed from command and placed in the seemingly minor position of military advisor to Confederate President Jefferson Davis. General Lee would find himself mocked in the Richmond newspapers as "Granny Lee" and "Evacuating Lee."<sup>15</sup> He would soon take over for the injured General Joseph E. Johnson who was commanding the largest Confederate force in the east. During the subsequent Seven Days Battles, Battle of Antietam, and Battle of Fredericksburg, Gen. Lee rapidly earned the loyalty and admiration of both Confederate soldiers and citizenry, as well as the respect from the Union forces for his abilities to command. It was during these battles that Gen. Lee came to rely heavily on the aptitude and competence of several chief subordinates.

## **CHIEF SUBORDINATES**

General Lee came to depend a great deal upon three key individuals who would become his chief subordinates. These individuals were Major Generals James Longstreet, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, and James E.B. (Jeb) Stuart. He understood their character, believed in their abilities, and trusted their judgment. In issuing orders Gen. Lee knew how these trusted subordinates would carry out his direction. Additionally, each one gained the respect and trust of Gen. Lee because of their devotion, loyalty, and above all their competence on the battlefield.

Major General James Longstreet was a large rugged character who Gen. Lee would affectionately refer to as his "old war-horse."<sup>16</sup> Maj Gen Longstreet was a graduate of West Point, had served and been injured during the Mexican War. He would be recognized for his abilities and he was promoted the rank of brevet Major for his actions during the war.<sup>17</sup>

Longstreet resigned his commission as a brevet Major and joined the cause of the Confederacy in 1861.<sup>18</sup> Longstreet would in time achieve the rank of Lieutenant General and become Gen.

Lee's most trusted subordinate. LtGen. Longstreet is generally accepted by historians as being a stoic figure with a firm belief in the defensive benefits of warfare. Gen. Lee would show his confidence in LtGen. Longstreet by appointing him to command one of the initial two corps in the Army of Northern Virginia (ANV). LtGen. Longstreet was dissimilar to MajGen. Jackson in almost every way, but the two would prove to complement each other perfectly.

MajGen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, was also a graduate of West Point and a veteran of the Mexican War. He would earn the rank of brevet Major for his superior performance during the war, having begun the war as a Second Lieutenant. Jackson was a deeply religious man who many considered to be rather humorless, secluded, demanding, and strong-minded. His determination and aggressive nature would serve him well as a general in the Confederate Army. It was these qualities and the ability to lead men that earned him his epithet "Stonewall," from General Bee during the Battle of Manassas.<sup>19</sup> Gen. Lee would come to have confidence in and depend upon the considerable abilities of MajGen. Jackson. He would be appointed to command the other one of Lee's two infantry corps in the ANV. The personalities of the two infantry corps of the ANV would become a reflection of their commanding officers.<sup>20</sup>

The third member of Lee's trusted trio was James E.B. Stuart, called Jeb from his initials. Jeb Stuart was a West Point graduate of 1854. It was during his time at the academy that he gained the attention of Gen. Lee and he became a friend of the family. Stuart was a gifted cavalry officer and joined that branch of service once commissioned. He would serve under Gen. Lee shortly during John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859. Jeb Stuart was said to be daring and brash, with a zeal for life and a cavalier attitude. His characteristics to some appeared

too flamboyant, but he backed up his bravado with his abilities and competence as a cavalry officer and leader. Trusting in these qualities, Lee was compelled to assign MajGen. Stuart to command his Cavalry Corps for his ability to strike the enemy quickly and provide valuable reconnaissance for the ANV.<sup>21</sup>

## **CHANCELLORSVILLE**

The Battle of Chancellorsville began as a result of a plan by Union MajGen. Joseph Hooker to envelop and crush the smaller ANV. Initially the grand maneuver worked and put Gen. Lee in a difficult position, one which MajGen. Hooker believed only gave Lee the option of retreat or destruction. Gen. Lee did not accept the options Hooker presented him. Instead, he reacted with ingenuity and daring to counter the Union threat. Acting contrary to the conventional military wisdom of the day, Lee divided his smaller force and attacked the Union army. MajGen. Hooker was unprepared for Gen. Lee's audacity and once Lee stole the initiative, Hooker was never able to recover. The results of the battle were far from what Hooker expected. What he had planned as a dramatic victory, ended in defeat.

The Confederate victory at Chancellorsville, which resulted in the Union forces withdrawing back across the Rappahannock River, is considered by most historians to be Gen. Lee's greatest victory. Gen. Lee, along with MajGen. Jackson, achieved a stunning victory over the numerically superior Union Army of the Potomac. Using tactics that exposed the ANV to great risk, Gen. Lee divided his army and struck the Union forces with some of the same audacity that he learned during the Mexican War under MajGen. Winfield Scott. While the Battle of Chancellorsville was a victory for the ANV, it was a very costly one. Gen. Lee's forces suffered heavy losses in personnel with no appreciable gain on the strategic level.<sup>22</sup>

The Confederate losses at Chancellorsville were heavy, and Gen. Lee was well aware that the victory had come at too heavy a cost. After the battle, he stated to an official concerning public sentiment, "I, on the contrary, was more depressed than after Fredericksburg; our loss was severe, and again we had gained not an inch of ground and the enemy could not be pursued."<sup>23</sup> Gen. Lee believed that the victory had accomplished nothing more than the survival of the ANV. The ANV had lost 13,460 dead, wounded, and missing as a result of the battle amounting to approximately 23% of the Confederate force. Of equal importance to Gen. Lee and the Confederacy, was that MajGen. "Stonewall" Jackson was also a casualty. In passing on his regards concerning the gravely ill Jackson, Gen. Lee commented, "my affectionate regards and say to him, He has lost his left arm, but I have lost my right arm."<sup>24</sup> These words would later prove to be prophetic in the coming months, but Lee could not afford to dwell on that which was gone. He had to look after his struggling army and the future of the Confederate cause.

Gen. Lee's army was not at full strength during the engagement. Of Lee's three trusted chiefs only two were available or involved in the Battle of Chancellorsville. Earlier Gen. Lee had sent Longstreet, along with two divisions, down to southeastern Virginia to halt Union advances in the area and to forage for much needed supplies.<sup>25</sup> Even after the severe losses incurred by the ANV, Gen. Lee thought that if he had his entire army he would have destroyed the Army of the Potomac. Was Gen. Lee referring to his absent divisions, or the absence of LtGen. Longstreet's leadership? The belief that his troops were capable of accomplishing anything, along with the fear that he would be unable to support his army logistically if they stayed in northern Virginia prompted Gen. Lee to believe that his only option was to move the fight into Union territory. Before placing his army on the road north, Gen. Lee needed to reorganize the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>26</sup>

## LEE REORGANIZES

Even before the severe losses suffered by the Army of Northern Virginia Gen. Lee was convinced that the army needed to be reorganized. During earlier campaigns Gen. Lee began to believe that, due to the size of the Confederate Corps in the ANV, even his highly competent corps commanders of Jackson and Longstreet were having difficulty in effectively managing their size. At the time the size a Confederate Corps was approximately 30,000 men, and one man maneuvering that large a force, particularly in wooded terrain, was proving difficult. He believed that if he reduced the size of his corps they would be able to maneuver more quickly and more efficiently.<sup>27</sup>

The reorganization of the Army of Northern Virginia was something that Gen. Lee wanted to do, but had not had the time to implement. After the losses incurred during the Battle of Chancellorsville Gen. Lee now needed to make changes to the structure of his army. Gen. Lee's solution to the problem of one man maneuvering approximately 30,000 men during battle was to transform the ANV from two large corps to three smaller ones. An added benefit, Lee believed, was that the reduction in corps size would reduce confusion during battle for the new corps commanders that he needed to promote. The reorganization would give each corps three divisions, so one additional division would need to be created.<sup>28</sup>

Gen. Lee's First Corps would remain under the command of LtGen. Longstreet and would for the most part remain unchanged. Longstreet was his senior lieutenant and Gen. Lee was more than confident in his abilities. Longstreet would lose one division, but his remaining divisions were commanded by capable and dependable men. These men were Lafayette

McLaws, John B. Hood, and George Pickett. Both McLaws and Hood were both experienced commanders, but Pickett had been injured at Gaines Mill and had seen limited action since.<sup>29</sup>

Second Corps would come under the command of the newly promoted LtGen. Richard Ewell. Ewell appeared to be the best choice for the Second Corps as he was Stonewall Jackson's most capable division commander, prior to his being wounded at Second Manassas in August 1862. Ewell had been out of action for an extended period recovering from his wounds, but Lee believed and Ewell thought that he was ready to rejoin the Army of Northern Virginia. Gen. Lee had little personal interaction with Ewell and knew him primarily by reputation as Jackson's lieutenant.<sup>30</sup> In addition, possibly unknown to Lee, Ewell was used to receiving specific instructions and had been given little leeway under the controlling Jackson. Regardless, he had proven himself as a proficient tactician and capable of troop handler under Jackson's direction.<sup>31</sup> Ewell's Corps was most affected by the reorganization and his three divisions would be led by the irascible Jubal Early, Robert Rodes, and Edward "Allegheny" Johnson, who was new to division command. Allegheny Johnson would also be leading four new brigade commanders. During this same time Gen. Lee believed it necessary to uncharacteristically relieve one of the division commanders, Raleigh Colston, due to incompetence and also relieve John R. Jones due to suspected cowardice. Normally Gen. Lee did not relieve those he found unworthy outright. Instead he would quietly find them a position outside of his army.<sup>32</sup>

Third Corps would be commanded by LtGen. A.P. Hill, who had also been promoted into the position. Gen. Lee was confident in his abilities as a division commander, even though he was somewhat apprehensive that Hill was susceptible to a mysterious recurring illness and was sometimes careless in his troop placements in combat (such as defensive positions at Fredericksburg). Also, he was prone to squabble with superiors, but now that Lee was his only

superior it was likely to be less of an issue. Hill was a determined and capable fighter who took good care of his men, but he would have to prove his worth as a corps commander. His divisions would be led by Dorsey Pender, Harry Heth (given the new ninth division that had only one battle tested brigade commander), and Richard H. Anderson.<sup>33</sup>

The cavalry division would remain in the capable hands of MajGen. Jeb Stuart. Of his six brigades three were led by proven cavalry officers, Fitzhugh Lee, W.H.F. Lee, and Wade Hampton. The two Lee's were Gen. Lee's nephew and son, respectively. The remaining three brigades were commanded by yet unproven cavalry officers who would require close supervision and guidance. Stuart would now have over 12,000 troopers.<sup>34</sup>

## **GETTYSBURG**

The Battle of Gettysburg is one of the most examined battles of the Civil War, and possibly of any American military battle. How someone of Lee's abilities, reputation, and string of victories in this war could suffer such a stunning defeat has fueled a significant amount of this historical interest. Taking the fight to the Union on their ground would, in Lee's view, have achieved multiple objectives such as providing much needed supplies, relieving pressure on Richmond, and demoralizing the Northern population.

Gen. Lee believed that he would be unable to support the ANV logistically if he maintained his position in Virginia, as the provisions that were being provided to his army from Richmond were inadequate.<sup>35</sup> Moving his army into the North, Gen. Lee would put pressure on the Union commander to pull his army north in order to protect Washington, thereby reducing the threat to Richmond.<sup>36</sup> A significant victory in the North could aid the Confederacy in possibly gaining recognition from foreign governments and with it obtain much needed foreign



aid. In addition, Gen. Lee believed that the best manner in which to deflect attention from the beleaguered Confederate city of Vicksburg was to have a strong army threatening Washington. Finally, Lee believed that a victory on Northern soil would demoralize the Northern population and move them to seek an end to the war.<sup>37</sup>

On the initial day of combat during the Battle of Gettysburg, Gen. Lee only had one of his three trusted subordinates on hand that he had complete faith in. LtGen. Longstreet, Gen. Lee's "old war-horse" was the only one of his trusted subordinates that was with him at all on the first day of hostilities. Longstreet, however, would not have direct counsel with Lee until early evening on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1863. Lee was still dealing with the loss of Stonewall Jackson and was unsure if LtGen. Ewell and LtGen. Hill would be up to the challenges of their new commands. During the latter stages of the march north toward the battle that would become Gettysburg, Lee had not been in contact with MajGen. Stuart and was without his primary source of intelligence.<sup>38</sup> Lee's manner in dealing with his trusted subordinates was to provide initial guidance and give his men the leeway to develop their own plan to carry out his intent. Gen. Lee failed to properly instruct Ewell and Hill, who were unaccustomed to the amount of latitude that they were given. On the morning of the first day, for instance, Lee was riding along with Longstreet and his corps, instead of accompanying either of his two new corps commanders. Lee's lack of familiarity with his new commanders would impact the course of the battle and will be examined in more detail.

As previously discussed, the aggressive and determined MajGen. "Stonewall" Jackson had been killed during the Battle of Chancellorsville. Lee trusted that once his orders were given to Jackson they would be aggressively and diligently carried out. Lee's confidence in Jackson allowed Lee to give his subordinate significant latitude in carrying out his orders. This allowed

Lee to focus on other issues and did not require him to constantly check up on his corps commander. In creating an additional corps during his reorganization, Lee helped his subordinates, but placed more work upon himself. His two new corps commanders had yet to be proven in their new commands, and this would likely required Lee to provide more time and energy to supervise their actions. This added time and energy would not have been required had Jackson survived, even with the addition of a new corps.<sup>39</sup>

For an extended period of time before the Battle of Gettysburg, Gen. Lee had been effectively blinded and made deaf by the absence of his Chief of Cavalry, MajGen. Jeb Stuart. In Gen. Lee's final report of the battle he spoke of the impact that Stuart's absence had, "The movements of the army preceding the battle of Gettysburg had been much embarrassed by the absence of the cavalry."<sup>40</sup> Lee believed that Stuart had abused the discretion he had been given in carrying out his orders and as such put the Army of Northern Virginia at risk because of the lack of intelligence on the movements of the Union forces. Without the knowledge of where and how the Union forces were arrayed, Gen. Lee had to make assumptions and take risks in engaging his forces at Gettysburg that he might not otherwise have needed to make.<sup>41</sup>

During the battle the majority of the orders given to Gen. Lee's subordinates were in the form of verbal orders that were intent driven, or were discretionary in nature, such as Lee's instructions for Ewell, "to carry the hill occupied by the enemy, if he found it practicable, but to avoid a general engagement...."<sup>42</sup> He did not adjust his style of command to accommodate his new and untested corps commanders. In particular, LtGen. Ewell was accustomed to being given explicit orders while under the command of Stonewall Jackson. It appears that Lee was not fully aware of the extent to which Ewell was prone to bouts of self-doubt and he did not fully take into account that under Jackson, Ewell did not handle discretionary orders well due to

indecision.<sup>43</sup> This suggests Lee either failed to identify these qualities in Ewell, or he chose to over look them failing to understand how his command style and Ewell would interact. LtGen. Hill demonstrated that he also had difficulty with these types of orders when he allowed his subordinate, MajGen. Heth, to open a general engagement on the first day of the battle, in direct violation of Lee's orders to the contrary.<sup>44</sup>

After the first day of battle concluded, the ANV was in very high spirits after inflicting heavy casualties on the Army of the Potomac and pushing the Union forces back through the town of Gettysburg. Gen. Lee was excited by the day's events and with his confidence in the capabilities of his army, believed that it would be wrong to withdraw to ground more of his choosing.<sup>45</sup> At this point some historians focus on the discord between Lee and Longstreet. Much has been made of this supposed discord and some believe that this is the cause of what some have interpreted as Longstreet's poor performance during the battle.<sup>46</sup> However, Lee makes no mention that he thought that Longstreet's actions during the battle were unsatisfactory. He knew Longstreet was deliberate, but once in the fight he had Lee's utmost confidence.<sup>47</sup> The first day of battle ended with the Union's Army of the Potomac holding the high ground outside of Gettysburg, but the ANV's morale was high from pushing the Union forces so fiercely.

The second day of battle concluded with both sides taking heavy losses, while neither gained an appreciable upper hand. Stuart, did not find his way to Gen. Lee until after mid-day on July 2<sup>nd</sup>. Lee chose to strike at the right flank of the Union army, but very little evidence exists as to what Lee's real objective was on the second day of the attack. Writings from Longstreet and his chief of artillery Colonel Porter Alexander state that the object of the second day was the Peach Orchard and ultimately Cemetery Hill.<sup>48</sup> The Peach Orchard was carried at a heavy cost but attacks on Little Round Top failed in part due to the wounding of MajGen. Hood

early in the engagement. Hood's division was relegated to fighting as uncoordinated units for an extended period, and the attack lost momentum and focus.<sup>49</sup>

The final day of battle brought the destruction of an entire division of the Army of Northern Virginia, and with it Gen. Lee's greatest defeat. On the final day, Lee chose to mount a determined assault in the direction of Cemetery Ridge toward what he believed was a weakness in the Union line of battle. As history has shown this attack failed and is remembered as Pickett's Charge, even though Longstreet was in command of the assault and two of the divisions were not from his corps. There is much debate as to Lee's true objective and intent. The records are unclear exactly what portion of the Union line was the objective, the effectiveness of the Confederate artillery preparation and support, the delay in the timing of the assault, as well as LtGen. Longstreet's objection to the attack. However, Lee took full responsibility for the assault and believed that it was for want of coordination that the attack was not successful.<sup>50</sup>

The objectives that Gen. Lee set forth for the campaign were not achieved, as a result of Lee's defeat at the hands of MajGen. George Meade commanding the Army of the Potomac. Meade had achieved a significant victory for the Union, but the Confederacy suffered an even greater defeat. The defeat of the Confederate forces at Gettysburg did not demoralize those sympathetic to their cause, but neither did it attract the support and foreign intervention that had been hoped for. The citizenry of the Union came away with a newly inspired sense of purpose and the Army of the Potomac gained some much needed confidence. Instead of gathering additional resources and bolstering the strength of the Army of Northern Virginia, the campaign left the army battered as it withdrew back to Virginia. Finally, to complicate matters for the Confederacy even further, the city of Vicksburg fell on July 4, 1863, just one day after the Battle of Gettysburg concluded.<sup>51</sup>

The losses suffered by both the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia were the greatest that the Union and Confederacy had ever seen. The Union losses were just under 23,000, including approximately 3,100 dead. This amounted to about one quarter of Meade's forces. Additionally, one general of promise was lost, MajGen. John Reynolds, along with numerous regimental and brigade commander casualties.<sup>52</sup> The Confederate forces suffered even greater damage to their army, returning back across the Potomac with less than two-thirds of the army. The ANV suffered over 22,000 casualties to include over 4,500 dead. Compounding the difficulty was the loss of more senior leaders; 19 of 46 brigade and divisional commanders were casualties, as well as just under half of all regimental commanders. The loss of leadership within the ANV was becoming a crisis, of which Lee was acutely aware.<sup>53</sup>

### **LEE'S EFFECTIVENESS AT GETTYSBURG**

Gen. Lee used what is considered a delegatory form of leadership, and failed to take into account the personalities of his new Corps commanders, in particular LtGen. Ewell. In the case of Ewell, Gen. Lee might have discovered too late that Ewell needed explicit orders and that he was prone to indecision and doubt. Just as Lee was unaccustomed to giving explicit instructions and closely monitoring his subordinates, Ewell was unfamiliar with operating under such conditions. The lack of personal knowledge that Lee had of Ewell, reduced the impact that Ewell's corps had upon the battle. Additionally, it caused poor coordination within the army and led to Ewell's lack understanding of Lee's intent for the development of the overall battle.<sup>54</sup>

As discussed earlier most of Gen. Lee's orders during the Battle of Gettysburg were issued verbally in the form of discretionary orders to his subordinates. Normally, Lee always had his trusted subordinates to carry these orders out. However, at Gettysburg he only had

Longstreet until late into the second day when Stuart arrived from his long roundabout ride. Lee did not fully supervise his subordinates once his orders were issued to his new corps commanders, and their lack of understanding or refusal to ask for more direct guidance led to indecision and lack of comprehension. Ewell's indecisive attacks on the first and second days, along with Hill's inability to influence the initial general engagement are just a few examples. While the blame for these failures cannot be placed entirely on Lee, it was his responsibility to ensure that his orders were carried out as he intended and, if not, then he was responsible for correcting his subordinates or for providing further guidance.

Orders were expected to be carried out by Lee's subordinates based on the intent that Gen. Lee provided and commanders were also expected to interpret changing battlefield conditions and adapt as required based on his intent. The short amount of time from when Lee reorganized his army, till the Battle of Gettysburg, did not allow for Gen. Lee to gain a solid understanding and familiarity with his new corps commanders. Being new to command at the corps level, Hill and Ewell were unproven and needed to be given more precise instructions as to what Lee expected when orders were issued. Lee should have been aware of this, and if he was he did not take the steps needed to clarify his intent.<sup>55</sup>

One of Gen. Lee's trusted subordinates MajGen. Jeb Stuart, also failed to accomplish the mission assigned to him by Lee, resulting in the ANV not having the amount of reconnaissance that Gen. Lee was normally provided. Proper reconnaissance was not completed due to MajGen. Stuart's failure to comply with Gen. Lee's intent during the movement north in Pennsylvania. Gen. Lee chose to ignore the additional risks to his army from the lack of intelligence on the disposition of the Union army, and allowed a general engagement to develop without knowing exactly what he was facing.<sup>56</sup>

During the first day of battle MajGen. Heth disregarded Gen. Lee's guidance and initiated a general engagement with Union forces outside of Gettysburg, and Ewell did not comprehend Lee's intent for the capture of Cemetery Hill. LtGen. Hill failed either to instruct his subordinate properly or supervise the execution of Lee's orders. Once MajGen. Heth opened the engagement, LtGen. Hill did little to stop, prevent, or correct Heth from pursuing his course of action. A portion of this failure could be attributed to the lack of viable intelligence because of the absence of the Confederate cavalry, but it could also partly be attributed to the recurrence of LtGen. Hill's illness. Regardless of the reason, it was not until Heth was fully engaged that Lee was notified. In addition to Hill's lack of action, LtGen. Ewell proved indecisive and ineffective in leading his corps to capture the ground which Lee believed was of tactical importance, namely Cemetery Hill.<sup>57</sup> Ewell did not understand the impact that his failure to capture the hill would have on the next day's fighting. A more aggressive commander understanding Lee's orders and intent might have made a different choice.

On the second day of battle LtGen. Longstreet did not implement the orders of Gen. Lee as quickly as was needed and the delay allowed the Union forces to interfere with the intended attack up the Emmitsburg Road. Longstreet's delay, which was a part of his slow, deliberate nature, allowed Union troops to occupy the desired ground of the Peach Orchard and obtain positions on Little Round Top. Knowing Longstreet's nature, Lee did not stress the importance of haste in Longstreet's attack up the Emmitsburg Road on July 2<sup>nd</sup>. The wounding of MajGen. Hood left his division, which held a critical part in the attack, without sufficient leadership during the assault and the resulting failure of his subordinate, BrigGen. Law to take command contributed to the division not accomplishing its mission.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Gen. Lee did not

ensure that either he or members of his staff properly scouted the route or terrain for the assaults on the second day of battle, causing delays and confusion.<sup>59</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Gen. Lee was ultimately responsible for the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg, and attempts to place blame elsewhere inhibit the ability to make objective assessments and are ultimately counterproductive. Many historians have sought to find fault and assign blame to others as to why Lee was defeated at the Battle of Gettysburg, but this accomplishes little (other than making some believe that Lee was truly infallible) and wouldn't their failings be his as well? Examining Gen. Lee and his leadership style, along with his interactions with subordinates, is the key to understanding the insights from this historical study. The purpose in examining the period of Lee's command from the Battles of Chancellorsville to Gettysburg was to limit the scope of this assessment and to focus on the effectiveness of Lee's command during this period. With that in mind, there are several factors that caused Gen. Lee to be less effective in command of his army at Gettysburg than at the Battle of Chancellorsville.

The loss of MajGen. Jackson played a greater role in the outcome of the battle than Gen. Lee believed it would or should have. With the death of Stonewall Jackson, Lee lost a trusted, determined, and aggressive leader. Jackson was considered by some to be the perfect complement to Longstreet. For example, LtGen. Longstreet's presumed hesitation on the second day was expected by Gen. Lee. However, he failed to give Longstreet clear guidance in performing a mission that he probably would have given to Jackson considering the speed with which he wished the command to be carried out.<sup>60</sup> Also, while the loss of Jackson was a severe blow, he was not as impossible to replace as it might have initially seemed. Lee was fully



capable of implementing changes in his command style to make up for the shortcomings of his subordinates. He failed to do this, however, and continued to interact with his new corps commanders in the same manner that he did with Jackson. Lee did not take the time to develop a full understanding of these men's strengths and weaknesses before beginning a campaign that he knew would challenge their capabilities.

Prior to the Battle of Gettysburg, Gen. Lee did not take the needed steps to correct a deficiency in his reconnaissance. Lee allowed MajGen. Stuart to conduct an unneeded incursion away from the main body of the army. The Army of Northern Virginia was conducting a movement into enemy territory and he allowed his most trusted source of intelligence to deprive the army of the means of maintaining contact with or gathering intelligence on the enemy. While it is true that Stuart took advantage of his freedom of action, it was Lee's responsibility to make certain that his subordinate understood that the most important part of his mission was, as it had always been, to scout for and provide intelligence to the Army of Northern Virginia. In addition, Lee did have two brigades of cavalry moving with the main body of his army, but failed to utilize them due to his over dependence on MajGen. Stuart. By giving Stuart orders that were too discretionary, both Lee and Stuart failed, setting the conditions for the ANV to find itself in an adverse tactical position facing a numerically superior Union force. Thus, the lack of sufficient reconnaissance reduced the effectiveness of the tactical maneuvers Lee employed, because he was forced to operate with an incomplete tactical picture of the battlefield.

Orders issued to LtGen. Ewell were not in the form that he had been accustomed to receiving under the command of MajGen. Jackson, resulting in hesitation and indecision during the battle. Gen. Lee failed to adapt his style of command to compensate for the inexperience of his new corps commanders, resulting in his orders and intent not being carried out as he

expected. Lee also failed to recognize that the reorganization of his army, and the loss of a trusted well known subordinate, would require modification to his own style of command to ensure that his orders and directions were understood and followed. In addition, Lee did not provide for sufficient time to get to know his new subordinates, develop measures that would identify their strengths and weaknesses, or instruct his subordinates as to what he expected from them when he issued orders to them. Finally, Lee did not recognize or choose to believe, even after the battle and later after the war, that it was his own ineffectiveness in the management of his subordinates that caused the lack of coordination that he believed was ultimately responsible for the Confederate loss at Gettysburg.<sup>61</sup>

There are several insights that can be gleaned from Gen. Lee's lack of command effectiveness during the Battle of Gettysburg. Commanders must know and understand their subordinates before they are thrust into situations that require close coordination and mutual understanding. It is imperative that personnel are placed in positions that allow them to fully utilize their skills and strengths, and if that is not possible then measures need to be adopted to mitigate the added risk to personnel and mission accomplishment. A solid understanding of unit or organizational limitations can prevent overconfidence and will allow units to take steps to ensure mission accomplishment. It is critical for junior officers that they be properly and continually trained to be able to replace those in more senior leadership positions if needed. Finally, proper supervision is required at all times, even for subordinates who are trusted and have shown the ability and competence to act autonomously. In the end, the ultimate appraisal of a commander's effectiveness, especially in combat, is whether or not their unit accomplishes its assigned mission or missions.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Richard Harwell, *Lee: An abridgment in one volume of the four-volume R.E. Lee* by Douglas Southall Freeman, (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961),6.
- <sup>2</sup> Richard Harwell, 11.
- <sup>3</sup> A.L. Long, *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee: His Military and Personal History*, (Secaucus, NJ: The Blue and Grey Press, 1983),28.
- <sup>4</sup> Richard Harwell, 19.
- <sup>5</sup> Michael Fellman, *The Making of Robert E. Lee*. (New York, NY: Random House, 2000),24.
- <sup>6</sup> Richard Harwell, 56.
- <sup>7</sup> John Esten Cooke, *A life of Gen. Robert E. Lee*, (New York, NY: D. Appleton and Company,1871), 20.
- <sup>8</sup> Richard Harwell, 76.
- <sup>9</sup> Richard Harwell, 77.
- <sup>10</sup> A.L. Long, 73.
- <sup>11</sup> Richard Harwell, 87.
- <sup>12</sup> John Esten Cooke, 23.
- <sup>13</sup> Richard Harwell, 110.
- <sup>14</sup> John Esten Cooke, 33.
- <sup>15</sup> James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988; 2003),302.
- <sup>16</sup> Jeffry D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005),200.
- <sup>17</sup> Jeffry D. Wert, 45.
- <sup>18</sup> Jeffry D. Wert, 51.
- <sup>19</sup> James McPherson, 342.
- <sup>20</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command: Volume Two: Cedar Mountain to Chancellorsville*, (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, Macmillan Publishing Company1943; 1995), 269-283.
- <sup>21</sup> Jeffry D. Wert, 85.
- <sup>22</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Chancellorsville*, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996),431.
- <sup>23</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 444.
- <sup>24</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 447.
- <sup>25</sup> James McPherson, 638.
- <sup>26</sup> James McPherson, 647.
- <sup>27</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996),43.
- <sup>28</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, 44.
- <sup>29</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, 52.
- <sup>30</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, 696.
- <sup>31</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, 45.
- <sup>32</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, 54.
- <sup>33</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, 44.
- <sup>34</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, 57.
- <sup>35</sup> A.L. Long, 269.

- <sup>36</sup> A.L. Long, 268.
- <sup>37</sup> Edwin C. Bearss with J. Parker Hills, *Receding Tide: Vicksburg and Gettysburg: The Campaigns That Changed the Civil War* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2010), 231.
- <sup>38</sup> Michael Fellman, 160
- <sup>39</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, 43
- <sup>40</sup> Michael Fellman, 160
- <sup>41</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, 502.
- <sup>42</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, 227.
- <sup>43</sup> Richard Harwell, 305.
- <sup>44</sup> Edwin C. Bearss with J. Parker Hills, 301.
- <sup>45</sup> Richard Harwell, 325.
- <sup>46</sup> Edwin C. Bearss with J. Parker Hills, 330.
- <sup>47</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, 503.
- <sup>48</sup> *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, ed. Ned Bradford. (New York, NY: Gramercy Books, 1956; 1998; 2001), 393.
- <sup>49</sup> Tory D. Harman, *Lee's Real Plan at Gettysburg*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003), 55.
- <sup>50</sup> Richard Harwell, 346.
- <sup>51</sup> Edwin C. Bearss with J. Parker Hills, 359.
- <sup>52</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, 496.
- <sup>53</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, 498.
- <sup>54</sup> Edwin C. Bearss with J. Parker Hills, 320.
- <sup>55</sup> Sears, *Gettysburg*, 45
- <sup>56</sup> A.L. Long, 278.
- <sup>57</sup> A.L. Long, 323.
- <sup>58</sup> Tory D. Harman, 55.
- <sup>59</sup> Tory D. Harman, 22.
- <sup>60</sup> Richard Harwell, 326.
- <sup>61</sup> Richard Harwell, 346.

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